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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 001426

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SUBJECT: GBRV LAYS BLAME FOR BORDER VIOLENCE

REF: CARACAS 1376

Classified By: Political Counselor Robin D. Meyer
for Reason 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: During the weeks of October 24-November 6, Venezuelan-Colombian border tensions rose sharply as a result of the killing of 10 kidnap victims (reftel) and two Venezuelan National Guardsmen, the arrest of three alleged Colombian DAS (Administrative Department of Security) agents by the Venezuelan government (GBRV), and the deportation of two Venezuelan military officials by the Colombian government. The GBRV has claimed the violence is a spillover from Colombia's internal conflict, which has been fueled by U.S. military support through Plan Colombia and the Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA). They also allege that Colombia is working with opposition figures to destabilize the GBRV, that Colombian paramilitaries were responsible for Venezuela's high homicide rate and lawlessness, and that opposition Governor Perez Vivas from the border state of Tachira has been in league with the paramilitaries. Chavez's attacks on foreign and domestic enemies is a common strategy for distracting public attention from domestic problems. How far Chavez will go beyond rhetoric to action is not clear. End Summary.

GBRV Blames Colombian Paramilitaries

12. (SBU) Minister of Interior and Justice Tarek El-Aissami told the National Assembly (AN) on October 29 that he had obtained evidence of CIA-funded plots to undermine the revolutionary governments of Venezuela, Cuba, and Ecuador from two captured Colombian DAS agents, Eduardo Gonzalez Munoz and Angel Jacinto Guanare. (Note: Colombia publicly denied that these individuals belonged to the DAS and claimed they were common criminals. End Note.) According to El-Aissami, Operations Falcon, Fenix and Salomon were being run by the "Goni" and "Condor" groups inside the DAS to help opposition groups destabilize these governments.

13. (SBU) On October 29, in remarks to ten Ambassadors at a credentialing ceremony, President Chavez blamed Colombia's internal conflict for doing "serious harm" to Venezuela and attributed the killings of the kidnap victims (reftel) to Colombian-on-Colombian violence. He then added, with all the "paramilitaries, terrorists, guerrillas, narcotrafficking, organized crime, and kidnappers (on the border), now it occurs to Obama, the Nobel Peace Prize winner, it occurs to him the marvelous idea of installing seven military bases in Colombia." That same evening, during a commemoration of the Simon Bolivar telecom satellite, Chavez went further and attributed a "good part" of Venezuela's rampant crime rate to

the spillover effect from Colombia's internal conflict, adding that murder, kidnapping and hitmen "used to be unknown in Venezuela."

¶4. (SBU) Vice President Carrizalez immediately blamed paramilitaries for the November 2 killing in Tachira by masked gunmen of two Guardia Nacional sergeants, who were manning a checkpoint. Chavez called the murders a "plan of the empire." Local police sources, however, told PolOff that gasoline smugglers were the likely suspects.

. . . And The Opposition is Also to Blame

¶5. (SBU) Chavista National Assembly Deputy Mario Isea appeared on state television on October 28 alleging two conspiracies, one between Colombian paramilitaries and Tachira State opposition Governor Perez Vivas (septel), and the other between Colombian President Uribe and exiled Maracaibo Mayor Rosales. Isea accused Uribe of exporting his narco-state model, paramilitaries and assassins to Venezuela. Carrizalez claimed on November 3 that Colombian paramilitaries crossed "with a wink of complicity" from Governor Perez Vivas. He also accused Perez Vivas and his followers of "secessionism."

¶6. (SBU) On October 26, Governor Perez Vivas called on President Chavez to "respect the constitution and the humanity of the Venezuelans," and, as Commander-in-Chief, to expel all armed groups in the region. The Governor organized a November 1 rally of almost 5,000 residents in Tachira's capital San Cristobal under the slogan "Life, Peace, Liberty and Justice" to demand an end to the violence in the region.

Colombia Expels Venezuelans

¶7. (SBU) Local press reported that Colombia deported Jesus Lugo Mendoza, a retired Venezuelan Army Colonel who had served as a military attache in Bogota from 2004-7 and who had been barred from reentering Colombia for four years. According to the press, Mendoza had been following Venezuelan exile Pedro Carmona, the businessman who briefly deposed Chavez in 2002. The media also reported Colombia's expulsion in late October of Venezuelan National Guard Sergeant Major Wilmer Gamarro Barretto for reportedly being in uniform and carrying a sidearm on the Colombian side of the border.

¶8. (C) Comment: Confronted with falling popularity, a deteriorating medical, electric, power and water infrastructure, and increasing public exasperation with rampant crime, Chavez is resorting to his traditional tactic of blaming foreign and domestic enemies for Venezuela's ills. We expect this angry rhetoric to continue as Venezuela moves to national legislative elections in September 2010. How far Chavez will go in turning from rhetoric to action is not clear. End Comment.
DUDDY